

THE 29TH ANNUAL
**GRADUATE STUDENTS IN MUSIC
CONFERENCE**
MUSIC
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BY,
AND
FOR THE PEOPLE

Keynote Address by

Dr. Miriam Piilonen

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Friday, March 6th and Saturday, March 7th
CUNY Graduate Center

sponsored by:



*All sessions will be held in person at the CUNY Graduate Center,
Room 5414 (5th Floor)*

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Acknowledgments

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Program

Friday March 6, 2026

**Presentation via Zoom.*

12:00–1:00 **Registration**

1:00–2:30 **Institutional Influences**

Chair: Dr. Agustina Checa

Disciplining Folk Tradition: Institutional Extraction and the Postcolonial Transformation of ‘Erquan Yingyue’

Siqi Tong (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)

Auditing Experimentalism: The New York State Council on the Arts and the Experimental Intermedia Foundation

Scott Chupp (Stony Brook University)

Sounding the Archive: *Nhạc Vàng*, Historical Memory, and Postwar Silences

Bryan Le (CUNY Hunter College)

2:30–2:45 **Break**

2:45–4:15 **Gender in Popular Music**

Chair: Dr. Anaar Desai-Stephens

“You Just Want to Dance”: Black Femme Hip-Hop, Mental Disability, and the Ethics of Public Listening

Simi Olabode (Case Western Reserve University)

“She’s Endangered Too”: Esperanza Spalding’s Curation of Wayne Shorter’s “Endangered Species” (1985/2012/2018)

Alejandro Cueto (University of Chicago)

Migrant Masquerades: Composite Gendering in Mexican Border Musics

Salvador Hernandez (University of North Texas)

4:15–4:30 **Break**

4:30–6:00 **Networks in Communication**

Chair: Dr. Sarah Politz

The Danger of the Refrain: how art can unintentionally support things that the artist did not intend

Joseph Franklin (University of Pennsylvania)

Sounding *Didxazá*: Indigenous Futures in the Istmo de Tehuantepec*

Kelsey Milian Lopez (CUNY Graduate Center)

Urban Street Music as Public Practice: Community Engagement in Istanbul*

Uğur Cihat Sakarya (Trabzon University)

6:00–6:15 **Break**

6:15–7:15 **Lecture Recital (*Elebash Recital Hall*)**

Chair: Dr. Steve Everett

The Pecking Order

Nolan Miranda (University of California, Irvine)

The Portable Concerto: Democratizing Larysa Kuzmenko's Piano Concerto through Score-Following Technology

Aaron Chow (University of Toronto)

7:15–8:30 **Reception (*Room 5409*)**

Saturday, March 7, 2026

**Presentation via Zoom.*

10:30–11:00 **Coffee and Tea (Room 5409)**

11:00–12:00 **Inclusive Pedagogy**

Chair: Dr. Joseph Straus

Epistemic Violence and the Invisibility of Latin American Art Music: A Critical Analysis Following Ewell

Julián Bahamón (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

“You Sound Forest Green”: Exploring the Connection Between Colors and Sound in Choral Music

Andrew Novak (Case Western Reserve University)

12:00–12:15 **Break**

12:15–1:45 **Reshaping Audiences through Media**

Chair: Eliot Bates

Reclaiming the Echo: Women’s Sonic Agency and Resistance in Iranian Sacred Spaces*

Mina Neizari (Bowling Green State University)

Inverting Iranian Maddahi Online: From B-2 Bombers to Dancing Bodies

Ali Davilan (University of Virginia)

Radio as Cultural Curator: The *Golhā* Program and the Democratization of Persian Classical Music in Pre-Revolutionary Iran

Nazanin Mousavi (Bowling Green State University)

GSIM 2026 – *Program and Abstracts*

1:45–2:45 **Lunch (*Room 5409*)**

2:45–4:15 **Technology Mediating Music and Discourse**
Chair: Dr. Theodore Gordon

“Behind the Masquerade – (un)Ironic Memetic Music on Instagram Reels”

Max Mielcarek (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

“This Idiot Hasn’t Seen *Goncharov*”: Online In-jokes and Creativity as Resistance*

Jeremy Francoeur (University of Western Ontario)

The Involuntary Electropop Turn: How Digitalized Music Software and Streaming Shape a Shared Aesthetic

Adai Song (University of Virginia)

4:15–4:30 **Break**

4:30–5:30 **Keynote Lecture**

Music Theory and Digital Publics

Dr. Miriam Piilonen
(University of Massachusetts Amherst)

Abstracts

Institutional Influences

Chair: Dr. Agustina Checa

Friday, March 6th, 1:00-2:30 PM

Disciplining Folk Tradition: Institutional Extraction and the Postcolonial Transformation of ‘Erquan Yingyue’

Siqi Tong (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign)

The iconic Chinese erhu piece “Erquan Yingyue” (“Moon Reflected on the Second Spring,” 二泉映月) now takes nearly twice as long to perform as in its creator Hua Yanjun’s (“Abing,” 1893-1950) 1950 recording. Through analysis of 45 professional recordings across three generations, national competition standards, and interviews with conservatory-trained performers, I trace how the transcription from Abing’s improvised recording in the mid-20th century enabled music institutions to extract cultural practices from working-class communities and repackage them as standardized pedagogy requiring formal credentials. Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, I demonstrate how conservatories in China articulate extractivist ideologies parallel to “Western” classical institutions, shifting authenticity from embodied street performance to institutional credentials. National competition repertoire requirements mandating “Erquan Yingyue” showcase how credentials simultaneously constrain the artistic expression of conservatory-trained erhu players and control access to authenticity.

In this context, the “slowness” was deployed as resistance within global power hierarchies. Contemporary educators and performers strategically appropriated Ming dynasty guqin aesthetics of “lightness, subtlety, elegance, distance” (輕, 淡, 雅, 遠) against an equally constructed “Western” standard of virtuosic speed and volume. The aesthetic conflict between invented artistic standards reveals how the modernization of Chinese traditional music unfolds as a fraught negotiation involving agency and resistance. Both Chinese and “Western” conservatory systems discipline bodies to embody particular class positions as aesthetic naturalness. The case of “Erquan Yingyue” thus illuminates broader tensions in how postcolonial institutions navigate cultural sovereignty and institutional legitimacy, demonstrating that music of the people becomes simultaneously appropriated by institutions and weaponized by educators and performers for new forms of cultural assertion.

Auditing Experimentalism: The New York State Council on the Arts and the Experimental Intermedia Foundation

Scott Chupp (Stony Brook University)

This paper constitutes an archival investigation of the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) grant application files of the Experimental Intermedia Foundation (EIF), a long running non-profit experimental music space and consortium in New York City. NYSCA's audits and reviews of EIF concerts in the 1980s provide a colorful glimpse of a particular time and place in experimental music history, involving composers like Éliane Radigue, Julius Eastman, and Phill Niblock. Yet perhaps more intriguingly, they document the relationship between avant-garde aesthetics, cultural policy, and public arts agencies. The NYSCA's critiques of EIF performances are often puzzling for the ways that they contradict common understandings of experimental music, but they too reveal crises of experimental and postmodern aesthetics during a period of rising neoliberalism and ideological conflicts around public arts funding.

This paper engages these histories, as well as questions about the ways that the founding philosophies of public arts agencies in the 1960s informed the trajectory of experimental music and the emergence of alternative spaces in New York City in the following decades. By closely reading the critiques and rhetorics found in the audits, I argue that 1980s “downtown” experimentalism constituted a coalition of experimental artists and public arts funding officials which, while sharing the mission of establishing an artistic community outside the demands of commercial industry, found contradictions and confusion in the process of realizing the project of NYC experimental music.

Sounding the Archive: *Nhạc Vàng*, Historical Memory, and Postwar Silences

Bryan Le (CUNY Hunter College)

This paper examines *nhạc vàng* (“golden music”), a sentimental genre associated with the former Republic of Vietnam, as a counter-archive that circulates historical consciousness through sonic and affective means. Long condemned by the postwar Vietnamese state as politically reactionary and neocolonial, *nhạc vàng* preserves lived experiences of wartime and postwar Vietnam and has persisted through censorship via underground and diasporic circulation. For many Southern Vietnamese in the diaspora, it remains a vital repository of memory, identity, and intergenerational connection.

As a counter-archive, *nhạc vàng* renders historical narratives legible that are often absent from official memory: carceral experiences, displacement, fractured family histories, and enduring state suppression. Its archival power emerges through the naming and collective recognition of songs, artists, and narratives shaped by political struggle. Diasporic institutions such as Thúy Nga and Paris by Night have structured the genre's circulation, mediating which histories are foregrounded, softened, or left unspoken through performance, production, and audience engagement.

In dialogue with critical historiography on archival silence, oral history, and affective memory, this paper argues that *nhạc vàng* demonstrates how music can sustain politically and emotionally charged histories across geographies, generations, and migration contexts. As a living archive, it challenges conventional understandings of historical preservation and shows how sound, affect, and community memory create forms of historical consciousness that exist beyond state and textual archives.

Gender in Popular Music

Chair: Dr. Anaar Desai-Stephens

Friday, March 6th, 2:45-4:15 PM

“You Just Want to Dance”: Black Femme Hip-Hop, Mental Disability, and the Ethics of Public Listening

Simi Olabode (Case Western Reserve University)

Contemporary hip-hop by Black female artists increasingly foregrounds mental health, vulnerability, and psychological fragmentation, positioning music as both personal disclosure and public address. Yet this visibility raises a central tension in popular music culture: what does it mean for music to be “for the people” when the people refuse to listen? This paper examines how Black female rappers such as DoeChii mobilize sonic strategies—alter egos, emotional excess, and humor—to render mental disability audible, while simultaneously navigating fan cultures that consume these disclosures as spectacle, relatability, or entertainment.

Drawing on Black feminist theory, disability studies, queer studies, and popular music studies, I argue that contemporary hip-hop publics practice a form of extractive listening, in which vulnerability is demanded but not ethically received. Through close readings of tracks like “DENIAL IS A RIVER” and “Crazy,” I show how DoeChii stages interior dialogue as a therapeutic practice, only for audiences to flatten this labor into memes, virality, and parasocial

intimacy. Fans' desires to "know" the artist—often framed as care—become coercive, transforming mental health into ongoing emotional labor in exchange for visibility and success.

Situating this phenomenon within longer histories of Black women's musical exploitation, I contend that the rhetoric of accessibility and authenticity in digital music cultures obscures unequal power relations between artists and their publics. Music that is by the people does not guarantee listening for the people, particularly when those people are Black women whose pain is already culturally devalued.

This paper explores how Black female musicians with mental disabilities are disembodied and consumed by their audiences, reducing their identities to spectacle while disregarding the emotional contexts of their work. I seek to ask how feminist music scholarship might move beyond the celebration of vulnerability toward more accountable modes of hearing, care, and refusal.

“She’s Endangered Too”: Esperanza Spalding’s Curation of Wayne Shorter’s “Endangered Species” (1985/2012/2018)

Alejandro Cueto (University of Chicago)

In 2012, Esperanza Spalding released the album *Radio Music Society*, which features her arrangement of “Endangered Species,” a composition originally from Wayne Shorter’s *Atlantis* (1985). Spalding opens with a quiet acoustic tableau—a solo guembri played by Leo Genovese and layered vocals on the new refrain “she’s endangered too.” This intimate, pentatonic frame sharply contrasts with Shorter’s original, whose dense synthesizers and electrified timbres exemplify the synthesizer driven experimentation of mid-1980s fusion. While Shorter issued an allegorical warning about the dangers of technological excess, Spalding recasts the piece as a call to refocus collective attention toward environmental care.

Rather than treating arrangement as secondary, this paper approaches Spalding’s version as a form of sonic curation that reframes Shorter’s ecological concerns for a twenty-first-century context. Drawing on Daphne Brooks’s theorization of sonic curation as a Black feminist practice of cultural memory, I argue that Spalding engages Shorter’s original not by echoing his electronic palette but by embracing acoustic timbres to evoke a future where humans live harmoniously with nature.

The paper unfolds in two parts. First, I situate “Endangered Species” within the cultural and technological milieu of *Atlantis*(1985), reading its synthesizer-driven

textures as dystopian commentary on humanity's growing dependence on technology. Second, I examine Spalding's 2012 arrangement to show how her acoustic instrumentation, textual additions, and programmatic framing shift the work's ethical call toward collective ecological investment. Together, these moments reveal Spalding as an active custodian of Shorter's legacy for 21st-century audiences.

Migrant Masquerades: Composite Gendering in Mexican Border Musics

Salvador Hernandez (University of North Texas)

Mexican popular musics are often discussed in relation to their ties to Mexican masculinity: be it with regard to how *música ranchera* [ranch music] reinforces Mexican machismo (Peña 1985; Pedelty 1999; De la Mora 2006), or how other variants of this masculinity appear in the north Mexican border tradition of *música nortea* [northern music] (Ragland 2009; Edberg 2011; Simonett 2006). However, an unfortunate consequence is that popular musics with stronger ties to femininity—such as those tied to rock-inspired *grupera* or Latin American pop—are often overlooked. As a result, existing works exploring masculinity and Mexican musics rarely consider the role that feminine sounds play in gendering these musics as a whole.

Using various performances of the Mexican ballad “Se Va Muriendo Mi Alma” as a case study, I demonstrate how the gendering of Mexican popular musics can vary through performative reconfigurations of musical elements that are themselves gendered based on their association with certain song styles. Such configurations—involving the lead singer(s) gendered behavior, song narratives, accompanying ensembles, and rhythmic grooves—either reinforce traditional sounds tied to gender, or shift performances into decidedly queer domains. Further, they open up new gendered expressions in association with migration's role in queering traditional gender roles

Networks in Communication

Chair: Dr. Sarah Politz

Friday, March 6th, 4:30-6:00 PM

The Danger of the Refrain: how art can unintentionally support things that the artist did not intend

Joseph Franklin (University of Pennsylvania)

"Art can unintentionally support things that the artist did not intend."

Composer Georg Friedrich Haas's warning becomes urgently concrete when we trace the afterlife of *Which Side Are You On?* (1931).

Written by Florence Reece during the Harlan County coal miners' strike—after armed deputies raided her home searching for her union organizer husband—the song has traveled far beyond its origins. Nearly a century later, its simple refrain circulates through labor strikes, civil rights movements, anti-fascist organizing, concert halls, and corporate media.

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the refrain as territorial marker, I trace how *Which Side Are You On?* deterritorializes and reterritorializes across struggles—from the SNCC Freedom Singers to Billy Bragg's miners' strike anthem, from Frederic Rzewski's piano variations to The Homobiles' queer anti-fascist version, and finally to HBO's *Succession*, where a workers' anthem becomes emotional underscore for a billionaire's heir.

I distinguish between reterritorializations that maintain material stakes and name concrete enemies versus those that reduce political struggle to aesthetic contemplation. The paper asks: What must remain intact for a political refrain to resist becoming generic struggle ambience? And how do we, as composers and scholars, track what our refrains are doing when they leave home—who they're interpellating, and on whose behalf?

Sounding *Didxazá*: Indigenous Futures in the Istmo de Tehuantepec*

Kelsey Milian Lopez (CUNY Graduate Center)

This paper examines how Zapotec hip hop, rap, and reggaeton in the Istmo de Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, operate as living practices of Indigenous language revitalization and cultural sovereignty. Centering musicians and collectives such as Juchirap and Roll G, who compose and perform in *didxazá* (Istmeño Zapotec language variant), I analyze how these artists engage the sonic, poetic, and political dimensions of popular genres to continue the legacy of notable

Zapotec writers, composers and poets from the same region. I argue their verses that make intimate references to traditional sones, and community practices held in Juchitán, create a cyclical intergenerational reproduction of the sonic Istmeño Zapotec repertoire. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2022 and 2025 in Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca City, and across transnational digital networks, I employ community based, participatory methods such as lyric analysis, performance observation, and interviews with musicians and poets to demonstrate how creative practice becomes a decolonial methodology. This project concerns Indigenous artists, youth, and language advocates who are reshaping public understandings of Indigeneity and self-representation while challenging state neglect, cultural appropriation, and organized crime. Popular music genres and poetry are co-constitutive art forms that foster intergenerational dialogue, regenerate linguistic pride, and create pathways for Indigenous self-determination. By analyzing the use of *diibxazú* in popular music genres within the broader field of music studies, this paper contributes to ethnomusicology by showing how artistic expression functions as both language work and sovereignty work, amplifying Indigenous futures through rhythm, verse, voice, and ancestral dialogue.

Urban Street Music as Public Practice: Community Engagement in Istanbul*

Uğur Cihat Sakarya (Trabzon University)

This study investigates how audience participation becomes visible in public space within contemporary street music practices in Istanbul. Rather than conceptualizing street music as a performance that is merely heard, the paper approaches it as a collectively produced public practice constituted through bodily, spatial, and digital forms of participation. Audience engagement is analyzed through three interrelated categories: bodily participation (dancing, clapping, singing, crouching, rhythmic movement and silent participation), spatial participation (approaching performers, reconfiguring proximity, and dissolving performer–audience boundaries), and digital participation (recording, photographing, and circulating performances across digital platforms).

Methodologically, the study employs video based audio-visual analysis and digital ethnography, drawing on publicly shared street music videos rather than interviews or in person field observation. The dataset consists of performances recorded and circulated between 2023 and 2025 in three distinct urban sites, Beşiktaş, Kadıköy, and Taksim, each representing different regimes of public interaction within the same city.

The findings demonstrate that street music does not simply take place in public space; it actively produces publicness through bodily, spatial, and digital

interaction. Participation intensifies at musical threshold moments such as choruses, rhythmic repetition, and tempo acceleration, where sound, movement, and proximity converge to generate temporary yet dense communal formations. By foregrounding observable forms of audience participation, the paper argues that street music functions as a participatory public practice that renders empirically visible the theme of music “of, by, and for the people.”

Musical Accessibility through Technology

Chair: Dr. Steve Everett

Friday, March 6th, 6:15-7:15 PM

The Pecking Order

Nolan Miranda (University of California, Irvine)

In this lecture-recital, I present *The Pecking Order*. This composition was inspired by an intriguing optical illusion: a diagonally moving line intersecting with another, perpendicular line at the same speed, appears to move purely horizontally or vertically. This inspired me to create a simple audiovisual instrument with four buttons, two possibilities of which are realized in *The Pecking Order*. The first movement is performed mechanically, with the computer reading instructions from a text file and firing lines from the corners accordingly. The second movement, by contrast, features live performers, introducing the inherent unpredictability and nuances of human interaction. This dichotomy between mechanical and human investigates the role of empathy between the audience and performers, especially given the relatability of the simple interface.

Given this simple interface I aimed to generate complexities from game-like text rules accessible to those from many backgrounds. The four button performers in this lecture-recital had just one hour-long dress rehearsal with the system, and my role as conductor is merely to press a couple of buttons out of view. Hence the title: what is the hierarchy here? What role does the conductor play, and does the system do more work than the performers in generating the experience? Is the audience observing performers observing the system? Do the button taps sound like little pecks, being triggered in some order?

The Portable Concerto: Democratizing Larysa Kuzmenko’s Piano Concerto through Score-Following Technology

Aaron Chow (University of Toronto)

The piano concerto is arguably the most exclusionary genre in Western classical music. Requiring a full orchestra, conductor, and concert hall, these works are economically inaccessible for most communities. This barrier disproportionately damages contemporary works by underrepresented composers, which often fail to enter the canon when logistical challenges prevent repeated performances, erasing these voices from public memory.

This lecture-recital proposes a technological solution: a portable “virtual orchestra” reducing a concerto's logistical requirements to a laptop and stereo output. Democratizing the Piano Concerto by Canadian composer Larysa Kuzmenko, this presentation utilizes Andrew McPherson's KeyScanner (an optical sensor strip granting any acoustic piano Disklavier-like abilities) to capture the performance, bypassing the latency and bleed of acoustic microphones.

The data drives NoteAbility Pro and Antescofo, a score-following engine acting as a “virtual conductor.” Unlike static backing tracks enforcing strict adherence to a click, Antescofo listens to the pianist's rubato, adjusting the virtual orchestra's entrances to the live performance. This allows the performer to play freely, beyond the strict confines of traditional tape like Music Minus One. Sonically, the system rejects the "MIDI" stigma using distributed computing to run modeled instruments. Utilizing round-robin sampling and physical modeling, the computer generates a unique and distinct realization for every performance.

This project does not seek to replace the symphony orchestra, but to extend its reach. Ultimately, it serves as a powerful advocacy tool, dismantling the socioeconomic barriers historically guarding the orchestral canon.

Inclusive Pedagogy

Chair: Dr. Joseph Straus

Saturday, March 7th, 11:00 AM-12:00 PM

Epistemic Violence and the Invisibility of Latin American Art Music: A Critical Analysis Following Ewell

Julián Bahamón (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

Philip Ewell's article *Music Theory and the White Racial Frame* (2020) marked a turning point that opened a debate about the conception of power structures within western music theory. Building on that discussion, this paper critically examines his proposal and its subsequent receptions, in dialogue with authors

such as Castro Gómez and Aharonián, in order to analyze how aspects of these frameworks may inadvertently contribute to the continued invisibilization of Latin American art music within academia.

Although the anti-racist methodology proposed by Ewell is pertinent, his recommendations regarding the epistemic diversification, when placed in a global context, could be reinforcing postmodern systems of power through what Castro Gómez identifies as “the invention of the other.” Thus, I claim that through the differences repressed by modernity and now fostered by globalization, Latin American music has been reduced to a single form of vernacular expression in which its legitimacy depends on its authenticity, and therefore on its otherness.

This paper, aligned with Ewell’s values, argues for refining current discursive frameworks that aim to challenge ethnic inequities and transform epistemological standards. Such a shift may occur in light of postcolonial theories that avoid binary categorizations (western vs. non-western) and through the full recognition of epistemic equality.

“You Sound Forest Green”: Exploring the Connection Between Colors and Sound in Choral Music

Andrew Novak (Case Western Reserve University)

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to determine how color associations are used in the context of choral singing. Specifically, this research focused on how one high school choir director used color associations in the choral setting, how she used color associations to promote blend and balance within her ensembles, and how she used color associations to cultivate students’ overall musicianship. The study consisted of semi-structured interviews, field observations, and artifacts. The participant used color associations to create blend, balance, and other musical connections among her students. It may be inferred from these implications that color associations may contribute to achieving blend, balance, and other artistic or practical results in ensemble contexts. Choir directors, including those with and without synesthesia inclinations, may consider using some of these techniques in their own teaching. Further, color associations and other sensory connections may be helpful in achieving a director’s desired performance goals within their ensemble.

Reshaping Audiences through Media

Chair: Dr. Eliot Bates

Saturday, March 7th, 12:15-1:45 PM

Reclaiming the Echo: Women’s Sonic Agency and Resistance in Iranian Sacred Spaces*

Mina Neizari (Bowling Green State University)

This presentation examines women’s resistance in contemporary Iranian public space, focusing on the dome of the Shah Mosque in Isfahan. It explores this symbolic structure, celebrated since the Safavid era as an architectural masterpiece and acoustic space designed to amplify religious sounds and masculine spirituality, and argues that this site has become an important stage for civil resistance. The focus is on how recent actions, particularly women singing beneath this dome and circulating videos on social media, have transformed the space’s symbolic meaning and traditional function. This presentation demonstrates how these performances, which directly challenge the post-1979 restrictions on women’s public singing, are not merely artistic acts but constitute a socio-political gesture. This research analyzes the Shah Mosque dome not as an architectural structure, but as an active medium whose acoustic properties have become a tool for resistance, allowing historically excluded voices to resonate.

This qualitative study is positioned at the interdisciplinary intersection of ethnomusicology, sound studies, spatial theory, gender studies, and media studies. The research is based on interviews, auto-ethnography, analysis of sonic-spatial situations, and case studies of social media samples. The theoretical framework originates with Brandon LaBelle’s concept of “Sonic Agency,” showing how sound becomes a tool for resistance and negotiation with systems of domination. This framework is expanded by integrating analyses from Laudan Nooshin on “digital agency” to account for the online dimension of these performances.

Inverting Iranian Maddahi Online: From B-2 Bombers to Dancing Bodies

Ali Davilan (University of Virginia)

For more than four decades, the Islamic Republic has mobilized maddahi (Shi’a lamentation chants led by lay preachers) as a dense sonic infrastructure across Iranian public space. In dialogue with scholarship on music and atmosphere (Riedel 2019), I approach this as atmospheric governance: performances saturate ceremonies, schools, streets, and broadcast media, producing a compulsory soundscape that shapes not only what people hear but how places are affectively organized. As a technology of governance, maddahi helps map

public life through geographies of mourning, loyalty, and revolutionary devotion, reinforced by state-linked religious institutions and media.

In a striking reversal, this same genre now circulates on Instagram as an editable, portable resource used for parody and other memetic forms that unsettle the authority it once amplified. This paper examines how maddahi's affective and ideological codes are re-signified through digital circulation, with particular attention to wartime and crisis moments. Through digital ethnography and close listening, I trace how creators reproduce maddahi's vocal timbre and rhetorical intensity to generate irony: sometimes redirecting devotional address toward militarized imagery, sometimes ridiculing official narratives of strength. In conversation with Papacharissi's concept of affective publics (2015), I argue that circulation helps translate satire into shared feeling and visibility.

Situating these remediations within the longer history of maddahi's politicization and the Islamization of public space, I treat Instagram as a platformed counter-space that reorganizes attention and feeling. I argue that circulation itself becomes politically consequential: reappropriated ideological sounds form small, shareable atmospheres that reveal limits and vulnerabilities in projects that govern through sound.

Radio as Cultural Curator: The *Golhā* Program and the Democratization of Persian Classical Music in Pre-Revolutionary Iran

Nazanin Mousavi (Bowling Green State University)

This paper examines the role of media in shaping Iranian musical culture before the 1979 Revolution, with particular focus on the *Golhā* ("Flowers of Persian Song and Music") radio program, which broadcast from 1956 until the eve of the revolution. Drawing on theories of media culture and ideology advanced by scholars such as Douglas Kellner, Andy Bennett, Charles Umney, and Krister Malm, the paper argues that radio in pre-revolutionary Iran was not just an entertainment platform but a powerful instrument for constructing and disseminating national cultural identity. Building upon this argument, the following sections explore the emergence and influence of *Golhā* within its historical context.

Against a backdrop of rapid modernization, foreign musical influence, and the commercialization of national radio in the 1940s and 1950s, *Golhā* emerged as a deliberate intervention to preserve and elevate classical Persian music and poetry. Under the artistic direction of Davoud Pirnia, the program introduced audiences to nearly 700 Persian poets and nearly 850 hours of curated

performances, combining literary commentary, traditional instrumentation, and refined vocal art to redefine classical Persian music as a serious intellectual and aesthetic tradition. These efforts set the stage for *Golbā's* broader cultural impact, examined in the context of state policy and national identity in the following analysis.

The paper demonstrates that *Golbā* operated in alignment with the Pahlavi state's broader modernization agenda, using the reach of national radio to cultivate a unified sense of Iranian cultural heritage while countering what critics perceived as the degradation of musical standards. By analyzing *Golbā* within frameworks of media policy, cultural hegemony, and national identity, this paper contributes to broader discussions of how state-supported media programs actively construct, preserve, and legitimize cultural traditions during periods of significant social transformation.

Technology Mediating Music and Discourse

Chair: Dr. Theodore Gordon

Saturday, March 7th, 2:45-4:15 PM

"Behind the Masquerade – (un)Ironic Memetic Music on Instagram Reels"

Max Mielcarek (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

A new generation of producers strives to make terrible music. These producers, primarily posting on Instagram Reels, have created a new satirical genre of both music and meme by emulating the practices, timbres, and mistakes of complete beginners: comedic and intentionally poor quality "shitpost" beats. However, the formation of digital literacies around the aesthetics of amateurism within this meme community causes actual amateurs to be misconstrued as satirical. The digital public miscategorized the music of one beginner producer, @prodbymasquerade, as ironic, ultimately encouraging his future music to become progressively "worse" in order to match the genre conventions with which he was mistakenly associated.

This paper analyzes the emerging genre of "Instagram shitpost beats" as memetic culture. Viewing these beats as not only pieces of music, but also as Katz and Shifman's digital memetic nonsense, reveals how musicians and social media publics interact through the lens of meme literacy. Drawing on Piilonen's study of music theory memes and social media, Rut-Kluz and Kopecka's two-stage model of memetic irony, D'Errico's analysis of interface aesthetics within digital audio workstations, and original interviews with prominent shitpost producers @prodbymasquerade and Dr. Hanky Spanky, reveals that meme-based cultural literacy directly influences music-making within the online public, and that niche digital communities on social media read music as meme. By placing Instagram shitpost beats in a broader historical context of online musical memes, this research contributes to the ongoing codification of auditory meme genres.

"This Idiot Hasn't Seen *Goncharov*": Online In-jokes and Creativity as Resistance*

Jeremy Francoeur (University of Western Ontario)

Goncharov is a Martin Scorsese film from the 1970s that doesn't exist. Instead, the concept of it was created by the community on social media blogging site

Tumblr as an inside joke. Despite its unreality, there is an abundance of creative material relating to it, including posters, discussions of the plot, and a full score. There is no true author of the film, yet several themes, characters, and plot points are remarkably stable among the imagined “canon” of the movie. The crowdsourced score’s successes and failures at being one cohesive product that is integrally bound to the “film” leave what folklorist Andrew Peck terms a “durable trace” of this de-centralized myth-making act. What does such an absurd creation reveal about communal creative activity online?

I argue that the *Goncharov* phenomenon is ideal for elucidating both the unique trajectory of communal music-making online, as well as its political context. I begin by analyzing the in-joke itself through the lens of folklore studies, using the resulting framework to map folkloric concepts onto an analysis of the score itself. Finally, I address the lasting implications of *Goncharov* artistically, arguing its creation as an act of conscious political resistance to a growingly capitalistic internet and a consumer-alienated media landscape. It is an artistic echo of online movements like The Yesterweb, a collective dedicated to creating a thriving anti-corporate “peripheral” web, and anti-Web3 sentiment and activism. Through this assertion, I provide a model for how to document these internet-based creative phenomena going forward.

The Involuntary Electropop Turn: How Digitalized Music Software and Streaming Shape a Shared Aesthetic

Adai Song (University of Virginia)

Over the past two decades, “electropop” has become less a bounded genre than a widely shared sonic grammar across global popular music. This paper argues that this convergence is increasingly involuntary: it emerges as musicians across genres and geographies pass through the same digital infrastructures that shape how music is produced, circulated, and evaluated. Rather than reflecting a scene-based stylistic movement, electropop crystallizes from the technical and economic conditions of contemporary music making.

Drawing on scholarship in music technology and sound studies (Katz 2010; Magnusson 2019; Danielsen and Brøvig-Hanssen 2016; D’Errico 2022), I show how this shared aesthetic emerges across four interlocking layers: domestic laptop studios that reshape spatial acoustics; software workflows and presets that standardize timbre and spatial simulation; royalty-free sample marketplaces that circulate modular sonic materials across amateur and professional contexts; and streaming platforms whose algorithmic metrics reward immediacy and clarity. A brief production analysis of FINNEAS and Billie Eilish’s “Birds of a

Feather” demonstrates how effects and preset timbres from plugins like Omnisphere, and recycled sample loops from Splice function as compositional tools rather than post-production embellishments, while platform data and industry reporting reveal how algorithmic feedback loops reinforce sonic convergence at scale.

By framing electropop as an infrastructural outcome more than a stylistic choice, this paper highlights how contemporary musical aesthetics are increasingly shaped by systems of access, automation, and circulation. The case of electropop thus raises broader questions for music studies about creativity, agency, and the role of technological infrastructure in shaping public musical life in the streaming era.

Keynote

Saturday, March 7th, 4:30-5:30 PM

"Music Theory and Digital Publics"

Dr. Miriam Piilonen

On the corners of the internet devoted to music theory, one can find scholars, students, and artists discussing current issues, jockeying for attention, and forming bonds with one another. Music theory Twitter, Music theory YouTube, the music theory subreddit, and meme pages, among others, have emerged as niche public spheres. Internet users have formed these digital public spheres to discuss music theory content; some of these users have leveraged these public spheres toward loftier goals of social transformation.

This presentation historicizes and analyzes some of music theory’s digital public spheres. I argue that the significance of online spaces for music theory is twofold: the internet enables the formation of digital publics but also fragments the field of music theory and its ability to speak to matters of social change. My research method combines institutional history, original interviews, close-readings of internet texts, and conceptual resources borrowed from critical theory. I offer an overview of music theory as a digital-media object going back to the early days of computer networking, when academic music theorists were the gatekeepers, to the opening-up of the internet to anyone with computer access. I analyze several recent transformations in music theory on the internet: the fun of meme culture, the formation and dissolution of significant discussion boards, the role of social media in fascist attacks on higher education, and the role of social media in confrontations among academics.

GSIM 2026 – *Program and Abstracts*

At the conclusion of this presentation, I reiterate my thesis statement as such: Music theory's digital public spheres are spaces that overlap with our academic institutions (our universities, societies, journals, publishers, etc.), while also incorporating a significantly powerful counterpublic whose members' interests can diverge or conflict with disciplinary orthodoxies. As such, we are confronted with opportunities to reevaluate the constructed binaries of public/private, academic/non-academic, and professional/amateur. If music theorists are to use the internet for real-world change, we must understand these dynamics and organize with each other for a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive internet.